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AUTHOR	Fidler, Paul P.; Still, Julianne
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ABSTRACT

During orientation programs conducted during the years 1967-72, a questionnaire prepared by the American Council on Education was administered to incoming freshmen at the University of South Carolina and over 300 other institutions of higher education. This report is a comparative analysis of the probable major fields of study of freshmen in regard to three of the above-mentioned years at the University of South Carolina and the national norms of the other participating universities. Results indicated the percentage of entering freshmen with indicating intentions to major in pre-professional areas and the social and behavioral sciences is increasing, while there appears to be a decreasing percentage of freshmen planning to major in engineering and business administration. The prospective major of most male freshmen is in business or professional areas, while the majority of women are planning to major in non-M.D. health professions, education, arts and letters, or social and behavioral science. Increasing percentages of entering U.S.C. freshmen are, however, undecided in their choice of a prospective major. (MJM)

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Division of Student Affairs

SUBJECT: Probable Major Field of Study of Entering Freshmen at the University of South Carolina for 1968, 1970 and 1972.

Research Notes No. 17-73 August 8, 1973

Principal Researchers: Dr. Paul P. Fidler
Assistant Vice President
for Student Affairs

Ms. Julianne Still
Graduate Research Assistant

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Research Notes
No. 17-73

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Subject: Probable Major Field of Study of Entering Freshmen at the University of South Carolina for 1968, 1970 and 1972.

Nature and Scope of the Study:

During orientation programs conducted during the years 1967-1972, a questionnaire prepared by the American Council on Education was administered to incoming freshmen at the University of South Carolina and over 300 other institutions of higher education.

The following is a comparative analysis of the probable major fields of study of freshmen in regard to three of the above-mentioned years at the University of South Carolina and the national norms of the other participating universities.

Secondly, there is a comparison of the responses made by freshman males and females at the University of South Carolina regarding their probable major field of study.

Comments: (Table 1)

1. The most noticeable changes in probable fields of study for U.S.C. freshmen have occurred in the areas of business, pre-professional, and engineering.

2. In 1968, 25.1 percent of the incoming freshmen at the University of South Carolina expressed an intention of studying business as their major field of study. Only 15.0 percent of the 1972 entering freshmen, however, listed business as a probable field of study.

3. According to the data gathered from entering freshmen at U.S.C., pre-professional study has been on the rise. The 1968 study indicates that 8.1 percent of the entering freshmen were planning pre-professional study, whereas 13.2 percent of the freshmen entering the University in fall, 1972 indicated a preference for pre-professional study.

4. Engineering, on the other hand, has shown a decline from 9.3 percent in the fall of 1968, to 8.7 percent in 1970 and 4.6 percent in 1972.

5. A greater percentage of U.S.C. freshmen plan to major in business, education, non-M.D. health professions, Arts and Letters, and the social and behavioral sciences than do freshmen at the national level.

Table 1

Comparison of Probable Major Fields of Study[1] for Entering Freshmen at the University of South Carolina and National University Norms, 1968, 1970, and 1972.

	South Carolina			National		
	1968	1970	1972	1968	1970	1972
Business	25.1	19.1	15.0	12.1	10.3	9.7
Education	8.5	10.4	7.5	8.5	7.3	5.4
Engineering	9.3	8.7	4.6	12.3	11.4	7.6
Health Professions (Non-M.D.)	10.2	7.8	12.4	5.5	7.2	9.2
Pre-Professional	8.1	8.6	13.2	9.8	11.7	15.0
Arts and Letters	13.8	14.6	15.6	16.4	16.7	15.0
Science and Mathematics	7.6	7.1	7.6	12.0	11.4	10.8
Social and Behavioral Sciences	13.9	17.9	15.4	14.8	15.1	12.5
Other Fields (Technical)	1.4	2.5	3.4	3.6	4.4	7.1
Other Fields (Non-Technical)	0.6	1.0	1.0	2.7	2.1	3.5
Undecided	1.4	2.2	4.2	2.1	2.2	4.3

[1]For the purposes of this study, several majors listed in the ACE questionnaire have been combined, so that the major areas listed would more clearly reflect the probable major field of study for U.S.C. freshmen within the academic structure of the University of South Carolina. For example, the Arts and Letters area above includes English, humanities, and fine arts; science and mathematics includes mathematics or statistics, physical sciences, and biological sciences; social and behavioral sciences includes history, political science, and social sciences. Agriculture has been included in "Other Fields (technical)."

Table 2

Comparison of Probable Major Fields of Study[1] for Entering Male and Female Freshmen at U.S.C. 1968, 1970, and 1972.

	Male			Female		
	1968	1970	1972	1968	1970	1972
Business	31.6	24.9	19.4	15.6	11.7	9.5
Education	2.7	3.5	1.3	17.2	18.9	15.4
Engineering	15.6	15.4	8.3	0.2	0.2	0.0
Health Professions (Non-M.D.)	4.9	3.8	5.4	17.9	12.8	21.2
Pre-Professional	12.2	13.5	20.4	2.2	2.5	4.1
Arts and Letters	8.4	9.4	10.4	21.8	21.3	22.3
Science and Mathematics	8.5	7.8	10.9	6.1	6.3	3.6
Social and Behavioral Sciences	12.8	14.8	13.4	15.6	21.7	18.0
Other Fields (Technical)	1.7	3.4	4.5	0.8	1.3	2.1
Other Fields (Non-Technical)	0.4	0.7	1.0	0.9	1.1	0.9
Undecided	1.2	2.4	5.1	1.7	2.2	2.9

[1]The footnote in Table 1 is also applicable to Table 2.

Comments: (Table 2)

1. Over half of all U.S.C. male freshmen intend to major in pre-professional areas, the Social and Behavioral Sciences, or business administration. Two-thirds of the females are planning to major in non-M.D. health professions, education, Arts and Letters, or the Social and Behavioral Sciences.
2. It appears that an increasing percentage of U.S.C. freshmen are undecided in their choice of a prospective major. The percentage of males who have not decided on a major field of study at their time of entrance at U.S.C. is increasing at a greater rate than the percentage of females who are undecided.
3. The percentage of males planning to major in Arts and Letters, Science and Mathematics and pre-professional areas is increasing. The percentage of both male and female students who report that their probable field of study is pre-professional is increasing, even though the percentage of males planning to choose pre-professional majors has consistently greatly exceeded the percentage of females in the same majors.
4. The percentage of both male and female students planning to major in business administration or engineering appears to be decreasing. The percentage of females who plan to major in Science and Mathematics is also decreasing.

Conclusions:

The percentage of entering freshmen indicating intentions to major in pre-professional areas and the social and behavioral sciences is increasing, while there appears to be a decreasing percentage of freshmen planning to major in engineering and business administration. The prospective major of most male freshmen is in business or pre-professional areas, while the majority of women are planning to major in non-M.D. health professions, education, Arts and Letters, or social and behavioral sciences. Increasing percentages of entering U.S.C. freshmen are, however, undecided in their choice of a prospective major.

Recommendations:

1. Because increasing percentages of entering freshmen indicate that they are undecided in their choice of a major field of study, greater emphasis should be given to pre-entrance academic advisement. The Summer Orientation Program in particular would appear to be an excellent vehicle for accomplishing this objective. More attention should be paid to career and vocational guidance especially during the freshman year.
2. Further study should be made to compare the major field of study as expressed by freshmen prior to enrollment with actual enrollment data. A careful analysis of any discrepancies among these data should be made to determine the positive as well as the negative influences exerted by the University on student decisions.

CAUTION

(1) The comments and conclusions in this Research Note are based on percentages not actual numbers. It is possible for the number of students enrolled in a specific area to increase over a certain period, while at the same time, the overall percentage of freshmen indicating that major area may decrease.

(2) These data reflect the intentions of entering freshmen to major in a certain field of study as measured during the summer and fall orientation programs. They do not necessarily reflect the actual enrollment data.